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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate changes in the practices of Jewish families which occurred after the first enrollment of a child in a Jewish Early Childhood Center operated by the Board of Jewish Education of Metropolitan Chicago. Participants included 109 families who completed survey questionnaires at the beginning and end of the school year. The questionnaire included four scales measuring levels of family practices in four areas: Holiday Celebration, Home Content, Keeping Kashrut, and Affiliation. Results indicated a significant change in Holiday Celebration and Home Content. The most significant increase was in the celebration of Sabbath, which was observed every week in the centers. No changes were observed in Keeping Kashrut and Affiliation. It was concluded that an early childhood Jewish program which emphasized parent involvement was associated with a significant positive change in the families' Jewish practice. Participating families increased holiday celebrations and acquired more Jewish objects after they enrolled a child in a Jewish Early Childhood Center. (Author/RH)

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The Relationship Between Jewish Early Childhood Education and Family Jewish Practices: Phase II

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to investigate the changes in the family's Jewish practice which take place after enrolling a child in a Jewish Early Childhood Center (ECC). The study expanded on a pilot study done in 1982-1983 by the same researchers. The sample was comprised of 109 families who completed survey questionnaires at the beginning and at the end of the school year. The questionnaire included four scales which measured levels of family practices in four areas: Holiday Celebration, Home Content, Keeping Kashrut, and Affiliation. Results indicated, as hypothesized, that there was a significant change in the first two scales. The most significant increase was in the celebration of Sabbath which is observed every week in the ECC. No changes were observed in the third and fourth scales which had a very limited range (2 and 4 points, respectively). It was concluded that an early childhood Jewish program, which emphasizes parent involvement, is associated with a significant positive change in the families' Jewish practice. The families increase their holiday celebrations and acquire more Jewish objects after enrolling their child in the program.

The Relationship Between Jewish Early Childhood Education and Family Jewish Practices: Phase II

The interaction between home and school has been the topic of many research studies over the years. A good number of them have indicated the significant impact of the home environment and parent involvement on school performance in both academic achievement and social growth (e.g. Head Start programs, Collins, 1984; Henderson, 1988).

The study described in this report, unlike the others, takes the opposite approach. It focuses on the effect of the school experience on family life. A computer search of two data bases (ERIC and Religion Index) revealed a lack of such studies in the past. In the field of Jewish education, only one study was done recently by Feldman (1988), which assessed the effect of the Jewish day care experience on the parents' Jewish identify.

In the past two decades pa ent educa tion has become of increasing interest to behaviorial and social scientists who have demonstrated an unequivocal need for it. (See, for example, Harmon &Ziegler, 1980; Jensen & Kingston, 1986.) Research confirms the general wisdom that parents are the primary influence on their children (O'Dell, 1974).

Mayer (1985), who studied the contemporary American Jewish family, cites increased divorce rates, higher rates of mixed

marriages, and a general breakdown of Jewish home observance. Thus it was felt it was important to determine whether it was possible to modify the behavior of young Jewish parents by providing them opportunities to interact with their children in Jewish celebrations at school, while also acquiring skills and information.

In their analysis of 48 studies of three types of parent education programs (behavioral, PET, and Adlerian), Dembo, Sweitzer and Lauritzen (1985) found behavioral parent training demonstrated positive changes in the behavior of both parents and children. According to Dembo et al., training parents to change their children's behavior has been well documented.

There are various schools of thought ranging from the psychoanalytic to the behavioristic about how parental values are internalized by children. A foremost social learning theorist, Albert Bandura (1967), feels children are more likely to imitate a model whom they personally hold in high regard and whom they experience as being similar to themselves.

Parents, by their example and style of living, help their children develop values, beliefs, and meaning. Victor Frankl (1962), an eminent psychotherapist, feels that the parent, by providing meaning for a child, develops a climate for healthy personality development.

Based on the foregoing principles, the Board of Jewish Education of Metropolitan Chicago (BJE) operates a model Early

Childhood Center (ECC) offering classes for children ranging from 18 months to 5 years.

The goal of the ECC is to promote in children a healthy personality which integrates Jewish identification. Incorporating an intensive parent involvement component was to be the vehicle for changing parental behavior.

The ECC program for children is characterized by a total integration of general and Judaic content, values and skills, as well as the incorporation of Hebrew language. The program is predicated upon a sound base of principles of child development and age-appropriate early childhood practices. It is open to families from all walks of Jewish life. A heavy emphasis is placed on the parent involvement component.

This includes three conferences with parents during the year, phone conferences at six-week intervals, monthly class newsletters, special family holiday parties, special holiday parent booklets, and father-child playdays. Also included are family celebrations of welcoming the Sabbath ceremony with parents and children in the school, a family-school Sabbath dinner for classes of 3-year olds, a ceremony marking the end of the Sabbath for 4-year olds, a special birthday party where Jewish tradition is observed, and a special Hebrew naming reaffirmation ceremony.

It was felt that the ECC staff had to be like a "Jewish mother" by providing warm, authentic Jewish experiences and information

which many of these young parents did not have. For those who did grow up with Jewish home experiences and Jewish schooling it was a pleasant and positive reinforcement.

Specifically, it was expected that the greatest changes would be observed in holiday celebration which is emphasized in school, especially Sabbath celebration. In addition, parents were expected to acquire Jewish objects for their homes to reinforce holiday celebration and Jewish tradition.

It was hypothesized that the parents' experiential involvement with their children would move them to incorporate more Jewish practices into their lives, thus strengthening the work of the school and instilling specific values of Jewish identity in their children.

The purpose of the study was to assess the change in the families' Jewish practices from the beginning to the end of the school year when enrolling their children in the program for the first time. The study expanded on the study done in 1982-1983 (Ravid & Ginsburg, 1985) using a more representative sample. It was hypothesized that there would be a significant increase in Jewish holiday celebration and Jewish home content.

Method

Participants

The target population consisted of the 174 families who enrolled their children for the first time in four Early Childhood

Centers (ECC) operated by the Board of Jewish Education of Metropolitan Chicago (BJE). The ECC are located in the North Shore and Northwest suburban areas of Metropolitan Chicago.

A total of 109 matched sets (63% of the total number of families) which included both pretest and posttest for the same family were available for the subsequent data analysis. A series of Chi square tests to compare the demographic characteristics of the 109 families to those of the total parent population indicated no significant differences between the two groups. All the data analyses reported below are based on the 109 families for whom matched sets were available.

The parent sample group was quite homogeneous. Most fathers were college graduates, who hold professional or managerial jobs. Approximately half of the mothers were homemakers and half worked outside the home. The mean age of the fathers was 35, with a range of 26 to 53. The mean age of the mothers was 33, with a range of 25 to 42.

Slightly over half of the parents were members of a synagogue; the majority being members of a Conservative synagogue. The majority of parents received at least some form of Jewish education (Figure 1). A higher percentage of fathers have had some form of Jewish/religious education, compared with the mothers.

In the sample studied there were 62 (57%) boys and 46 (43%) girls; most children were first-born (Table 1); and most were 3 years old (Table 2).

Figure 1: Jewish/Religious Background of Parents

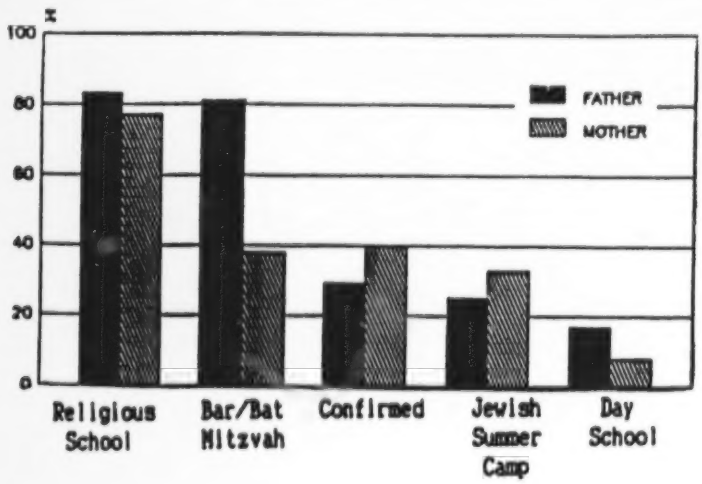

Table 1

Birth Order of Children

Birth Order	N	%
First born	60	55
Second born	34	31
Third born	13	12
Fourth born	1	1
Missing	1	1
Total	109	100

Table 2

Age of Children

Age	N	%
2	38	35
3	63	58
4	6	6
Missing	2	2
Total	109	100

Instrument

The survey used to collect the data was the same one used in Phase I (Ravid & Ginsburg, 1985) with only slight modification to facilitate computer data processing. In addition to the demographic information, it included four scales: (a) Holiday Celebration,

range of 0--46 points; (b) Home Content, range of 1--18 points; (c) Kashrut (keeping a kosher home), range of 0--2 points; and (d) Affiliation, range of 0--4 points. The Holiday Celebration scale included a list of all the Jewish holidays, including Sabbath, and the various activities which are a part of the holiday celebration. For example, lighting Hanukkah menorah and blessing the candles, fasting on Yom Kippur, and going to the synagogue to hear the megillah (the Book of Esther) read on Purim. The Home Content scale listed items which may be owned by a practicing Jewish family. For example, a mezuzah on the door, Pesah seder plate, and a prayer book. The Kashrut scale simply inquired whether the family kept a kosher home. The Affiliation scale was designed to determine the family's affiliation with a synagogue and the charitable contributions to Jewish organizations. It should be noted that during the school year, each holiday (with the exception of Sabbath), was celebrated only once, thus the responses on the posttest should be viewed mainly as an intention for celebration in years to come. The demographic information requested was lengthy, and was included in the pretest only. In addition, the posttest asked parents to indicate in which ECC activities they participated during the school year. Of the nine activities offered, only four were geared to all parents and they comprised the Activity scale.

The split-half reliability of the Holiday Celebration scale was r=.93, and that of the Home Content scale was r=.87. The other

two scales were too short for reliability assessment.

The response scales were basically of two kinds: those which were Yes/No and those with three possible responses: Regularly, Sometimes, and Never. In scoring the responses, 1 point was given to Yes and 0 points to No. For the 3-point response scale, 2 points were given to Regularly; 1 point to Sometimes; and 0 points to Never.[1]

Cross tabular analysis was used to assess the change in the frequency of specific behavior. For each variable, an index of positive change was computed. For variables scored as Yes/No the index was computed by taking the number of respondents who changed from No (on the pretest) to Yes (on the posttest), and dividing it by the total number of respondents answering No on the pretest (the potential number for change). For variables scored as Regularly/Sometimes/Never, the index of positive change was computed by summing the number of respondents who changed from Never to Sometimes or to Regularly, and those who changed from Sometimes to Regularly; and dividing this sum by the total number of respondents who answered Never or Sometimes on the pretest (the potential number for change).

Design and Data Analysis

Although the design of the study was pre-experimental, one-group, pretest-posttest (see Campbell & Stanley, 1963), it should probably be viewed more as a case study because, due to logistic and budgetary constraints, a control group was not available at the time

the study was conducted. In the design described above, there may be confounding extraneous variables (e.g. maturity) that can jeopardize internal validity, according to Campbell and Stanley. It is also possible that a partial reason for the changes observed is the fact that the parents who decide to enroll their child in the ECC program are already predisposed to change. Therefore, when interpreting the results, caution should be exercised in assuming that the changes observed were caused solely by the intervention.

to analyze the change between pretest and posttest scale scores, a series of t-tests for paired samples was used.

In order to study the relationships between parents' level of participation in the various activities offered throughout the year and the questionnaires scale scores, the Pearson's correlation was considered. However, due to the high level of parents' participation (average around 81%), and the limited range of scores on the Activity scale (only four activities were offered to all parents), it was decided that a t-test for independent samples would be more appropriate. Thus, for each activity, two groups were created: Group 1, of parents who participated; and Group 2, of parents who did not participate in that particular activity. The dependent variables were the posttest scored on the Holiday Celebration and the Home Content scales.

Procedure

The pretest surveys were mailed in the Fall of 1986 with a

An index of positive change was computed for each specific activity (e.g. blessing Sabbath candles, or purchasing a Jewish children's book). The most noticeable increase was in the Sabbath-celebration activities and in acquiring Sabbath-related objects for the home. The holiday most celebrated, as indicated on the pretest and posttest, was Hanukkah. In addition, large positive changes were objeserved for Yom Kippur observance, visiting a synagogue sukkah, contributing to Jewish National Fund (tree purchase), attending megillah reading during Purim, and having a Passover seder at home.

The level of parent participation in the various activities offered throughout the year to different age levels ranged from 51% to 88%, with a mean of 81%. A series of t-tests was performed to compare the level of Holiday Celebration and Home Content scores of parents who participated in each activity (Group 1) and those who did not participate (Group 2). In all but one test Group 1 had a higher scale score mean, although only two tests were statistically significant ($p < .04$) and one test approached significance ($p < .08$).

Discussion

The results suggest that an early childhood Jewish education program can have a positive effect on the family's holiday celebration and on Jewish home content, as was hypothesized. The posttest means for the Holiday Celebration and Home Content scales were significantly higher than the pretest means. The difference was larger in the Holiday Celebration scale, probably due to the fact that it had a

response rate of 71% (N = 124) after two mailings. The posttest surveys were mailed in June of 1987, at the conclusion of the school year and after the celebration of the last Jewish holiday. The posttest response rate, after three mailings, was 75% (N = 132). A total of 109 matched sets (63%), with both pretest and posttest for the same family, comprised the data base for the study.

Results

A series of t-tests for paired samples was performed to assess the change between the pre-enrollment and end-of-year surveys. The Holiday Celebration and Home Content scales showed a significant increase, with a t (103) = 6.21, $p < .0005$; and t (108) = 5.25, $p < .0005$, respectively (Table 3). The Kashrut and Affiliation scales indicated no change.

Table 3

T-test for Paired Samples: Comparison of Pretest-Posttest Results for the Four Scales (N = 109)

		Mean	SD	t
Holiday Celebration [a]	Pre	18.44	10.59	
				6.21*
(Range 0--46 points)	Post	24.40	7.69	
Home Content	Pre	10.08	4.24	
				5.25*
(Range 1--18 points)	Post	11.21	3.73	
Kashrut	Pre	.69	.54	
				.21 NS
(Range 0--2 points)	Post	.68	.54	
Affiliation	Pre	1.54	.99	
				.13 NS
(Range 0--4 points	Post	1.55	1.00	

*$p < .0005$ NS=Not significant a Complete records were available for only 104 cases

wider range than the Home Content scale. It may also be more sensitive to the Early Childhood Centers' (ECC) impact.

There was no difference between pretest and posttest scores on the Kashrut and Affiliation scales. This could be explained by two possible reasons: (a) the two scales have a very narrow range (2 and 4 points, respectively); and (b) the ECC program, after 9 months, could not possibly affect families to such a great extent as to decide to start observing Kashrut or to join a synagogue.

The results indicated the largest increase between pretest and posttest was for Sabbath-related activites in both the Holiday Celebration and Home Content scales. Since the celebration of Sabbath is done weekly at the ECC and many parents' activities center around it, it is logical to expect the most significant increase regarding Sabbath.

Among the holidays, the one most celebrated, as indicated both on the pretest and posttest, is Hanukkah. This finding is not surprising, considering the fact the holiday has a great appeal to young children and it comes about the same time of the year as Christmas.

The data indicated that the ECC program encouraged more parents to celebrate several other holidays more intensively (Yom Kippur, Tu Bishvat, Purim, and Passover) and that parents bought additional Jewish items for their homes during the school year.

One important component of the ECC program is parent involvement.

The survey results indicate the level of participation in the various activities offered was quite high (with an average of 81%). Additionally, based on the *t*-test analyses, there is strong evidence to support the claim that parents who participate in the activities have a higher level of holiday celebration and Jewish home content. However, due to the study design, causal relationship between participation and practice should not be implied without further empirical evidence.

In conclusion, the study described above indicates that enrolling a child in a quality, well-planned Jewish nursery school with an intensive parent involvement component can have a positive effect on the parents' Jewish practices. Both children and parents are exposed to information about Jewish observance and have a chance to experience and practice what they learn. As a result, parents are more likely to increase their Jewish holiday celebrations and to purchase Jewish items for their homes.

The question which must be studied further is whether this positive change observed will carry over into the future, and if parents will remain committed Jews interested in furthering their child's Jewish education. It is also suggested that a similar study be carried out using a control group from a Jewish early childhood program which does not have an intensive parent component.

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Footnote

1. This scoring implies an interval scale, and there were arguments presented against assuming that the interval between Always and Sometimes is the same as between Sometimes and Never, for example. In fact, similar arguments can be presented against treating any Likert-type scale as interval. Since the latter procedure is common in research, it was decided that, although the procedure may not be very psychometrically sound, it might still yield reliable, useful information.